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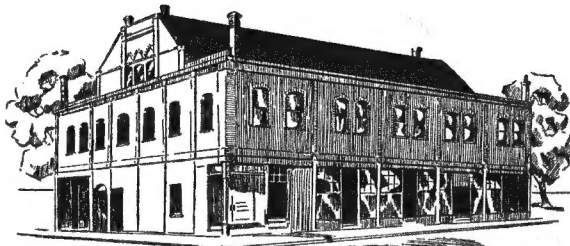
# Robert Burns

## HIS LIFE AND POETRY



*An Address Delivered by*  
REV. CHARLES BRUCE PITBLADO, D.D.

*In Selkirk Hall*  
WINNIPEG, MANITOBA  
February 25th,  
1884 ✓



SELKIRK HALL

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REV. CHARLES BRUCE PITBLADO, D.D.

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## Foreword

My father, Rev. Charles Bruce Pitblado, who was born in Dunfermline, Scotland, came to Winnipeg from Halifax, Nova Scotia, in November, 1881, when the population of the city was about 6,245, having accepted a "call" to be the first minister of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church which had just been organized. The "call" was signed by 45 communicants and 36 adherents. He subsequently, as is well known, became the first minister of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Winnipeg.

Selkirk Hall was built at the corner of Logan Avenue and Stanley Street as the first church home of the new St. Andrew's congregation.

In those pioneer days the ministers of the various city churches here, besides performing the usual pastoral duties, were leaders in the educational and cultural life of a new city. Accordingly my father from time to time prepared and delivered addresses and lectures on various topics. These were largely attended and much appreciated, and constituted a valuable addition to the much needed entertainment of our people.

After my father's death in 1913 I found among his papers this address on Robert Burns which was delivered in Selkirk Hall in 1884 when the population of Winnipeg was approximately 16,900. I submitted this address to some Scottish literary friends who advised me that it was worthy of being printed as a valuable addition to the many books and articles which have been written about the poet.

I would like to pay a tribute to the work which my father performed in early days by quoting the following from the *Halifax Herald* of April 23rd, 1913, on the occasion of his death:

*"Not only as a preacher and church worker was Mr. Pitblado great. He was a patriotic Canadian, who, thirty years ago, fully appreciated the magnificent heritage we had in this Canada of ours, and with a seer's eye he realized the coming greatness of the broad expanse of the Dominion from ocean to ocean. His thanksgiving sermons, dwelling on Canada and our responsibilities as stewards of its vast resources, were inspiring, and there are many men yet in Halifax who cannot forget them.*

*"The world is the better because such a man as C. B. Pitblado lived in it and Canada's national and religious life is the richer on account of his labours."*

I desire to express my thanks to my friends, Arthur L. Dysart and Carlyle Allison, for their kindly advice and assistance in connection with the publication of this address.

ISAAC PITBLADO.



Winnipeg, December, 1955.



# Address on Robert Burns

Delivered by  
REV. C. B. PITBLADO, D.D.

ROBERT BURNS was born on the 25th day of January, 1759. His birthplace was near the Brig O'Doon on the banks of Ayr in a clay biggin built by the hands of his father, and within sight of the ruins of "Alloway's Auld Haunted Kirk", which the poet has made memorable forever in his famous poem "Tam O' Shanter". Here, thousands of tourists come every year to see the old house and the crumbling ruins. To some, the sight is nothing but sticks, stones, dirt and a guide book, surrounded by cows, clods and peasants. To others, it is the sacred shrine of Scottish sentiment, radiant with memories of poetic genius. What we see depends, very largely, on what we are. Scenery can make no picture in the soul when the camera of poetic sentiment is wanting.

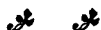


Two or three days after the birth of the poet, a fearful storm blew down the gable of the building in which he was born, and he and his mother had to be removed to a neighbour's house, amid the darkness of the night and the raging of the hurricane, in order to get a place of shelter. In speaking of his experiences in after life, he used often to say: "No wonder that one ushered into the world amid such tempest should be the victim of stormy passions." Perhaps no better keynote to the inner experiences of his life could be given than this statement. His poetry is largely the sighing and singing of the storm that agitates his soul. Even when kissing the zephyrs, and basking in the sunshine, he never seems to lose sight of the storm cloud that lowers on the horizon of life; and his soul, strung to the finest chords of poetic sentiment—like an Aeolian harp—turns even the raging of the hurricane into music for the listeners. He is the child of impulse—the poet of feeling.

The clay biggin was rebuilt after the storm. The first seven years of Burns' life were passed under its lowly roof. He was cared for by a sagacious, kind, Christian mother, whose memory was stored with an inexhaustible treasury of Scottish songs, stories and traditions, with which she completely saturated the young poet's mind. His mother's wit was Scottish sentiment. His father was an honest, stern, religious nursery gardener for whom Burns always entertained the most profound love and reverence, and whom he has immortalized in this line of his "Cotter's Saturday Night", better than by the epitaph he afterwards wrote for his tombstone:

*"The saint, the father and the husband prays."*

His mother, a believing Christian; his father, a praying saint. Does manhood require a nobler ancestry?



Burns, to his dying day never forgot, though he did not always heed, the religious lessons of his early life. From infancy he was inured to hardships. Hunger often made his homely fare of green kail and parritch a dish palatable to his taste. Hunger is good kitchen. He knew what it was to have his bare feet nipped by the cold of winter, and his face and legs burnt and browned by the sun of summer. It was the picture of Burns in his peasant home, near bleak moors and storm-capped hills, and suffering the pangs of penury, that made Taine, the brilliant French writer, say: "Scotland is a hard place to be born in." In that hard place Burns was born, amid the music of Scottish song, the influence of Scottish piety, and the pinching of Scottish poverty. And there is little need to regret the hardships of his lot, for, had Burns not been a poor yeoman, he could not have been a popular poet—had he not been a sufferer, he could not have been a singer. The most brilliant diamonds do not sparkle till they have been cut and ground and polished. Manly character is begotten in pain, not pleasure. And for him and all sensitive souls, there is less suffering in the poverty that pinches than in the pity that patronizes.

When Burns was in his seventh year, his father leased the farm of Mount Oliphant, situated about two miles from the Brig O' Doon. The soil was poor and the seasons often unpropitious, and here for eleven years, the poet, with his father and brothers, struggled against poverty, factors and misfortunes, for a bare existence. He says that his life at this time was—"the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing toil of a galley-slave." But amid poverty and toil and self denial, provision was made for Robert's education, according to the idea of the Scottish people, who consider it a disgrace to allow their children to grow up without schooling. His father, with some neighbours, hired a teacher for their children, who evidently did his work well, for if he did not give them a great deal of instruction, he did what was far better, he instilled into his scholars a thirst for knowledge, the great achievement of a successful teacher. His teacher says he found Burns a morose, melancholy boy, but his brother Gilbert, a bright cheery lad. Gilbert learned music readily, but Robert had an untunable voice and a dull ear. So the schoolmaster thought—but he did not see that the poet's soul was then being tuned to give voice to that music which has since thrilled the hearts of his countrymen with its melody all over the world. Many of us build better than we know.



In his fifteenth year Burns fell in love with one whom he calls "a bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass." They were "shearers", or "reapers", Burns and his sweetheart, together on the same rig in the harvest field. She was a sweet singer, and lightened the toil of the day with many a delightful song. "Her voice," says Burns, "made my heartstrings thrill like an Aeolian harp." To the keynote of love he tuned his lyre and wrote his first song, and he says concerning the experience—"Thus, with me, began love and poetry."

This is his first effusion:

O once I loved a bonnie lass,  
Ay, and I love her still;  
And whilst that virtue warms my breast,  
I'll love my handsome Nell.

As bonnie lasses I hae seen,  
And mony full as braw;  
But, for a modest gracefu' mein,  
The like I never saw.

She dresses aye sae clean and neat,  
Both decent and genteel;  
And then there's something in her gait  
Gars ony dress look weel.

A gaudy dress and gentle air  
May slightly touch the heart;  
But it's innocence and modesty  
That polishes the dart.

'Tis this in Nelly pleases me,  
'Tis this enchants my soul;  
For absolutely in my breast  
She reigns without control.

Long afterwards he says: "I composed it in a wild enthusiasm of passion, and to this hour I never recollect it but my heart melts, my blood sallies at the remembrance." He never forgot, though he did not marry, his first love. He lit the lamp of his genius at the fire of love, and ever afterwards, his poetic life was warmed and inspired, by its glow.



In his eighteenth year, the family of Burns were driven by stress of circumstances to leave Mount Oliphant, the cradle of the poet's muse, and lease the farm at Lochlea in the Parish

of Tarbolton on the North of Ayr. Around this home circled seven years more of manly struggling with the hardships of human existence. Here, Burns learned the manhood of peasant life. He bore the burden of severe physical toil in a spirit of independence. He endured the pinchings of poverty with cheerful patience. He warmed his heart at the flame of love, as it glowed in his own bosom, or in the souls of his peasant companions, and he drank from the poisoned as well as from the pure streams of pleasure; and perhaps in no other school, could Burns have learned so well what it is to be a man; and without this lesson his poetry would have lost all its strength and muscle, its pith and power. For, if Burns is anything peculiar, he is a muscular as well as a sentimental poet. His heart is soft as a child's, but his grip is firm as a giant's.



In his nineteenth year, he went to the village of Kirkoswald, on the <sup>Cornish</sup> ~~Cornish~~ coast, to learn mensuration and land surveying. The place was full of smugglers and wild adventurers, whose acquaintanceship Burns soon made, and they introduced him into scenes of swaggering riot and roaring dissipation which soiled while it excited the soul of the impassioned poet. But he soon found that for him it was easier to make rhymes than to work out problems in mathematics. Besides, he was in danger of falling into dissipated habits and even getting into love scrapes, so after having written the song beginning:

*Now westlin winds and slaught'ring guns  
Bring Autumn's pleasant weather*

addressed to a pretty girl he met in a kail yard, he returned home to meditate and toil; to love and sing. While engaged in severe manual labour or after the toils of the day, he often tried to soothe the raging passions of his soul by making songs, and, as he sang them to calm his troubled breast, his countrymen heard the strains, and recognized the poet's voice. He was appreciated as a local rhymers long before he was recognized as a

national poet. At Lochlea, his power began to be felt, and the poet was not without honour in his own country.

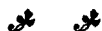


Burns had now come to that stage in his experience, when he became convinced, that to live happily, he must love purely. His heart was under this instinctive feeling all his days; and who will deny that in this respect:

*The light that led astray  
Was light from Heaven.*



He wanted a wife. He needed a wife. He could get a wife. Under this impulse, he fixed his affections on Ellison Begbie, the daughter of a neighbouring farmer, and seriously made her an offer of marriage. The four love letters which he wrote to her have been preserved and are manly productions, as masculine as they are sentimental. Some of the songs addressed to her are: "The Lass of Cessnock Banks"; "Bonnie Peggy Allison" and "Mary Morison".



We are thankful that his love, ere it was frozen by refusal, crystallized into this gem of lyric poetry:

*O Mary, at thy window be,  
It is the wish'd, the trysted hour!  
Those smiles and glances let me see,  
That make the miser's treasure poor:  
How blythely wad I bide the stour,  
A weary slave frae sun to sun,  
Could I the rich reward secure,  
The lovely Mary Morison.*

*Yestreen, when to the trembling string  
The dance gaed thro' the lighted ha',  
To thee my fancy took its wing,  
I sat, but neither heard nor saw:*

*Tho' this was fair, and that was braw,  
And yon the toast of a' the town,  
I sigh'd, and said among them a',  
"Ye are na Mary Morison".*

*Oh, Mary, canst thou wreck his peace,  
Wha for thy sake wad gladly dee?  
Or canst thou break that heart of his,  
Whase only faut is loving thee?  
If love for love thou wilt na gie,  
At least be pity to me shown:  
A thought ungentle canna be  
The thought o' Mary Morison.*

But Mary jilted him and the circumstances made a wound whose scar was never obliterated from his soul. His heart was soured but not broken by the disappointment. He could suffer without making a fool of himself. His head was level, though his heart was soft.

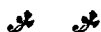


Immediately after his disappointment he went to Irvine to learn the trade of a flax dresser. At this time he was sullen, moody, miserable, gloomy, at war with himself and the whole world. The fountain of his life had been turned into bitterness, and he was ready to seek sweetness in any stream, whether pure or impure, that came in his way. He found companions who were ready to initiate him into the ways of evil to which he had hitherto been a stranger.



One of his biographers says: "His sojourn in Irvine was to him a descent into Avernus, from which, in the conduct of after life, he never altogether recovered, however often he may have done so in the moments of his higher inspiration". He says himself that the friendships he formed here did him

harm. They led him to the swine troughs of sensual gratification in which he often afterwards indulged to his sorrow. They taught him how to make a loose creed fit lax morals and he never forgot, though he did not always practice, the lesson. They disclosed to him the fascinations of convivial scenes in which he always shone the brightest star of all the company and continued to do so all through life. He always was a jolly good fellow.



This Irvine experience was a dark hour in his history. His partner in trade cheated him out of all his property. His shop was burned down in a New Year's carousal, in which he played a prominent part, and he was left dejected and penniless by his own misconduct. He returned to his father's home at Lochlea, broken down and utterly wretched, to meet toil, poverty and death. Shortly after his return to the old home, his father died. The death bed of his parent was a sad scene for the poet. As he watched beside the dying saint, he heard him say, as if in prayer: "There is one of my children whose future I cannot think of without fear". Robert came up, and bending over his prostrate father, said: "O father, is it I you mean?" "Ay, Robert, it is you," said the father as he turned and looked wistfully with a dying gaze on his son. Robert turned away, with tears streaming down his cheeks, and his bosom swelling with emotions that threatened to break his heart, and the pangs of that awful moment he never forgot. That death bed scene was a lighthouse, on the shore of eternity, that he often saw as he was tossed about on the stormy sea of life.



Financial ruin overtook the family on the death of the elder Burns at Lochlea. Gilbert and Robert saved enough out of the wreck of bankruptcy to stock the farm at Mossgiel, about a mile from the village of Mauchline, and a lease of which they had procured some time previously. To this new home they



took their widowed mother and younger brothers and sisters. Here Burns began in downright earnest to work for success as a farmer. He says: "I read farming books, I calculated crops, I attended markets, and, in short, in spite of the devil, the world and the flesh, I believe I should have been a wise man; but the first year, from unfortunately buying bad seed; the second, from a late harvest, we lost half of both our crops. This upset all my wisdom, and I returned like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire."



The four years that Burns spent on, or rather in connection with, the poor moorland farm at Mossgiel were momentous with the great experiences of his life. Here he faced failure as a farmer. Adversity and disappointment drove him almost mad. His passions raged and drove him into all sorts of vagaries. In revelry, he tried to drown the voice of conscience. In the cup of poison, he sought the sweetness of pleasure. The result was that his frailties as a man were exposed to the public gaze. He became defiant against public opinion and resentful to private interference. He denied the right of any man or body of men to sit in judgment on his character. His recklessness, both in speaking and acting, at this period, was largely an assertion of his independence. He desired, he said, to be free, not in order that he might sin, but to be free in his sinning. He did wrong and knew it, but when men undertook to throw at him the stones of condemnation, it did not humble, but exasperated him. Stoning a man will never reform tho' it may kill him. He sinned and he confessed it, but when men tried to brand him with the offence he retorted in rage. Rubbing the dirt in will never clean anybody. Men often irritate the wounds they undertake to dress. The physicians of Burns caused pain without effecting a cure. Many of his epistles and not a few of his epigrams, epitaphs and satires were written under the rankling feelings of bitter resentment. The remembrance of his follies

often stung him with remorse. The interference of his fellow-men always stung him into a frenzy of resentment.



Carlyle, in most forceful language, thus describes the case of the poet about this time: "With principles assailed from evil example without, by passions raging like demons from within, he had little need of sceptical misgivings to whisper treason in the heat of battle or to cut off his retreat, if he were already defeated. He loses his feeling of innocence; his mind is at variance with itself; the old divinity no longer resides there; but wild desires and wild repentance alternately oppress him. Ere long, too, he has committed himself before the world. His character for sobriety, dear to Scottish folk, as few corrupted worldlings can conceive, is destroyed in the eyes of men, and his only refuge consists in trying to disbelieve his guiltiness, and is but a refuge of lies. The blackest desperation gathers over him, broken only by the red lightnings of remorse."



In this condition the poet spoke often in bitterness of soul; he burlesqued in wrath; he satirized in anguish of spirit. But the brightness of his genius dazzled men's eyes, and hid from their sight the venom of his anger, and the stains of his vices. We live in an age when not only charity, but genius, covers a multitude of sins.



He drew inspiration from the excitements into which he plunged. The more he suffered, the better he sang. The busier he was, the more he wrote. It was high pressure in living that made this period of his existence so prolific in poetic effusions. The storm that raged within continually whistled through the chords of his lyre, which he always tuned according to the fitful mood of his soul. It was bitter or sweet, hilarious or sad, sacred or profane, as the pendulum swung, or the wind

blew. In this way we see him writing an epitaph for his father's tombstone, and then penning "Holy Willie's Prayer". He gives utterance to the "Cotter's Saturday Night" and then indites the "Holy Fair". He thunders forth "The Ordination", and speaks sweetly "To a Mouse". He recites the "Jolly Beggars", and then gives an "Address to a Mountain Daisy". "The Twa Herds" and "The Twa Dogs", and the "Address to The Deil", and the "Address to The Auld Mare, Maggie," the "Prayer in View of Death" and "Scotch Drink", are witness of the susceptibility to impulses of different kinds which controlled his life and coloured his poetry. It may be said of him that he lived in spasms of misery, or enjoyment, and wrote in fits of poetic frenzy.



We confess we are prejudiced in favour of Burns. We often feel as if the very soot in the chimney of the fires of his genius were sacred dust—but it is soot nevertheless. We try to make the very ashes of his poetry the fine gold of sentiment, but it is ashes nevertheless. He was a singer, but not a saint. He was a man to be admired, but not a model to be copied. He was a Scotsman of whose genius we are all proud, but a countryman whose failings we deplore. Better, probably, if he had left undone many things which he did, and had he been silent many a time when he spoke. But the past is irrevocable; and, looking at his mistakes, we may be warned by them, while we cover up with the cloak of charity, and try to bury them in the grave of oblivion. Putrifying corpses, even tho' the bodies of our dearest friends, should be consigned to the tomb, not exhibited to the public gaze.



In 1785, his courtship with Jean Armour, his future wife and the daughter of a worthy stone mason of Mauchline, began. The father interfered to prevent a marriage and tried to separate them. He did not succeed. Robert and Jean were married in private. When the father discovered the true state of the case, he cursed his daughter, burned the written covenant of

marriage and forbad the poet from coming near his house. When Jean became a mother, the law was invoked on her behalf, and Burns had to hide as a fugitive from justice. Referring to this matter at a later period of his life, he says: "This was a most melancholy affair which I cannot bear to reflect on, and had very nearly given me one or two of the principal qualifications for a place among those who have lost the chart, and mistaken the reckoning of rationality." At this juncture he resolved to go to the West Indies, and wrote his "Lament" and "Ode to Despondency and Ruin." They are written in English, and are peculiarly pathetic. This is the last stanza of the Lament:

*Oh! scenes in strong remembrance set!  
Scenes, never, never to return!  
Scenes, if in stupor I forget,  
Again I feel, again I burn!  
From ev'ry joy and pleasure torn,  
Life's weary vale I'll wander thro';  
And hopeless, comfortless, I'll mourn  
A faithless woman's broken vow!*



About the time that he had been cast off by Jean Armour and persecuted by her family, he met Mary Campbell, a simple and sincere-hearted Highland girl from Argyleshire. The real facts of the romantic story have never been divulged. This much we know, they fell desperately in love with each other. They met one Sunday on the banks of the river Ayr and spent a day of parting love together. They swore mutual and eternal fidelity to each other on a Bible which Burns presented to Mary, and on which he wrote these words with his own hand:

"And ye shall not swear falsely by my name. I am the Lord.—*Lev. 19th chap., 12th verse.*  
Thou shalt not forswear thyself but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oath.—*Matt. 5th chap., 33rd verse.*

MARY CAMPBELL                      ROBERT BURNS"

The names originally inscribed on the volume are almost obliterated. Having taken that vow on the Sabbath afternoon near the Castle O' Montgomery, they parted never to meet again on earth. Burns, it is said, never mentioned the name of Mary Campbell to anyone of his family, though he has immortalized her by perhaps the most pathetic lyrics ever written in any language, viz.: "Highland Mary", and "To Mary in Heaven".



Mary came to Greenock on her way back, it is said, to seek the poet. Here she was attacked with fever and died. The feelings of the poet at this time are described in a letter written to his friend Robert Aiken: "I have been for some time pining under secret wretchedness from causes which you pretty well know—the pang of disappointment, the sting of pride, with some wandering stabs of remorse, which never fail to settle on my vitals like vultures, when attention is not called away by the calls of society or the vagaries of the Muse. Even in the hour of social mirth my gaiety is the madness of an intoxicated criminal under the hands of the executioner. All these reasons urge me to go abroad, and to all these reasons I have but one answer—the feelings of a father."



He tried to get money to pay his passage to Jamaica by publishing a volume of his poems. He brought out the Kilmar-nock Edition of 600 copies. He got the money; had taken a steerage passage from Greenock to Jamaica and was on the eve of leaving when he received a letter through a friend urging him to come at once to Edinburgh and issue a new edition of his poems in the capital of his country. He gladly yielded to the solicitation and instead of going to the West Indies to be a slave driver, he went to Edinburgh to be the star of its literary society. And so the fires of genius which had been fanned into a bright flame by the storms of life on the Mossiel farm, came

to shed their brightness on the literary towers of Edinburgh, hence to shed their radiance over all Scotland and Christendom.



Now let us remember that Burns paints himself in his poetry. His poetical productions are the outcome of his character, his feelings, his inner life. They are the mirror in which the poet is reflected, and there is something sad about the pictures of the man, Robert Burns, which we so often see shining distinctly through the transparency of his poems. He lived tragedy though he sang comedy. We can see him often represented by a broken heart, dwelling in the tombs of crushed hopes, and singing so sweetly among the ruins, that all Scotland and many a foreign land, echoes with the notes of his melody. Thus he wrote his "Lament" the "Epitaph to His Father" the songs to "Mary", and the "Lines on The Death of His Favourite Child". It is the sad, sweet music of a suffering heart! And yet, like the canary, had he not been in the darkened cage, he never would have sung at all. Out of a suffering soul comes the sweetest music of life. Again you may see him represented by the lamp of genius, blurred and bedimmed by the stains of human folly, but shining with an electric brilliancy that consumes the smoke of its burning and hides the stains of its defects. Genius covers a multitude of sins. Such are his "Epistle to a Tailor", "Address to The Deil", "The Holy Fair", "The Twa Herds", and "A Candle in a Sweetheart's Window".

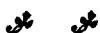


And yet, if folly had left no stain, genius would have made no sparkle! From reefs strewn by wrecks, the lighthouse sheds its most welcome light across the sea. We see him again, as pride fighting with poverty and making the laugh of good humour drown the barking of the wolf at the door. Desperation laughs at danger. So he writes to brother Davie. Thus he indites "A Man's a Man For A' That". Thus he sings,

"Contented Wi' Little and Cantie Wi' Mair". And thus he recites "The Jolly Beggars". And yet, only for the poverty, we would never have had the laugh. The man who has nothing that can be stolen is free from all fear of robbery. Again, he is a pleasure seeker, lighting up the pathway of dissipation by the lamp of genius, and illustrating its dangers by his own example, and transmitting the fumes of whiskey into the gas jets of poetry. Such are his poems on "Scotch Whiskey", "The Whistle" and many Bacchanalian songs of superior merit. Without the whiskey there would have been no gas jets of genius. Reeking corruption often enriches the soil on which the flowers of beauty grow!



The publication of his poems made a stir in Scotland which has perhaps never been equalled unless by the publication of some of the novels of Sir Walter Scott. In a few weeks after the edition of 600 copies had been brought out, his name was famous and he became the object of attention from many of the most illustrious of his countrymen.

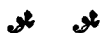


The mission of Burns as a poet. What special work did he do for his countrymen—for the world? Dugald Stewart, the renowned Scottish metaphysician, was sojourning during the summer months near the poet's residence, and he invited him to dine with him one summer evening. Lord Daer, eldest son of the Earl of Selkirk, was one of the party. This was Burns' first introduction to nobility and he celebrated the event in a characteristic poem which, for pure broad Scots, he never excelled.



At this time, also, he made the acquaintance of Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop with whom he afterwards kept up an almost uninterrupted friendly and confidential correspondence until his

death. This lady was recovering from a severe illness and was in a state of deep mental depression. A copy of Burns' poems, which had just been published, was laid on her table. She opened it at "Cotter's Saturday Night", and the perusal of that poem was so pleasing to her that it acted like a charm on her disordered mind. It was balm to her wounded soul. It was harmony to her discordant spirit. She sent for the author and that friendship was formed which lasted through life.



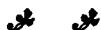
His visit to Edinburgh lasted about six months. It was the great sensation of the season in the Scottish capital. He was patronized by the Lords of the realm; he was courted by ladies in the highest circles of society; he was feasted by the rich; he was honoured by the learned. His introduction into high life was for him little else than a dizzy whirl of fashionable excitement. But he never lost his good sense even when on the very pinnacle of fame. His powers as a conversationalist became more conspicuous than his genius as a poet. He was the soul of every party where rank, wit, wealth and beauty assembled around him. He literally captured all hearts by his social fascinations, and put all the literary circles of the city in a buzz of admiration. He was hailed as the poet of his country, and the lion of society. His triumph was complete. But the dust and din of his six months triumphal march through the capital made him sigh for the clear air and the green fields of his quiet country home. Burns felt that man made the city but God made the country, and he was far more fascinated with God's work than with man's achievements.



He left Edinburgh with some £500 at his command as a part of the profit from the sale of the books. This was more money than any of the Burns' had ever possessed. He came home to his old widowed mother, rich and famous. She met him at the door of their humble dwelling, and with a heart overflowing

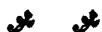


with motherly pride and affection, said: "Oh, Robert!" The son replied with choking voice, "Mother", and they two—mother and son—mingled their tears of affection and joy over the poet's brilliant success.



At this time, too, the Armours were restored to his favour and he and his Bonnie Jean were reconciled to each other. Success mollified his angry father-in-law. We do not know how he managed his mother-in-law—but he did not marry her—he married her daughter, Jean. He triumphed in poetry, and conquered in love.

The boy's "Bonnie Jean". A little boy selling ballads was brought to Mrs. Burns' house after she was a widow. He was very anxious to see her. He was taken to the kitchen and Mrs. Burns was informed of the boy's wish. She came out and said: "And so you wished to see Mrs. Burns, did you?" "O aye, I wad like to see her." "Well, you see her now—I am Mrs. Burns." "Losh, you're joking." "Why do you think I am joking?" "Because Burns speaks about his 'Bonnie Jean'."



Shortly after this he made two or three journeys through various parts of Scotland enjoying the scenery and calling on the gentry. It was in these journeys that he obtained a great deal of the material which afterwards formed the substance of his songs. One incident is worth mentioning. A boy was acting as his guide through one of the glens. His companion, Burns, asked him: "Have you read the poems of Burns?" "Yes", he replied. "And which do you like best?" "A weel, I like the 'Twa Dogs' gie weel and also 'Death and Dr. Hornbrook', but best of a' I like 'Cotter's Saturday Night', although it made me greet when my father got me to read it to my mother." Burns looked at him with a peculiar expression and said: "Well, my callant,

it made me greet more than once when writing it at my father's fireside." Let us never forget that that poem was begotten in tears.



After his tour through Scotland, Burns paid a second visit to Edinburgh. He spent nearly five months in the city without being much noticed by his old friends in the higher classes of society. With true friends, however, in the lower grade of life, he lived, flirting, carousing, and talking in his most brilliant strain. Still, he felt keenly the intentional neglect of those who had once patronized him. It was mortifying to his pride to be thus slighted by the great. He never forgot, and scarcely ever forgave, the cruelty of their coldness. The feeling it engendered, fermented into a bitterness against rank and wealth to which he often gave expression in his poetry.



Allan Cunningham thus describes the contrast between his first and second visit to Edinburgh: "On his first visit the doors of the nobility opened spontaneously 'on golden hinges turning'; and he ate spiced meats and drank rare wines, interchanging nods and smiles with high dukes and mighty earls. A colder reception awaited his second coming. The doors of lords and ladies opened with a tardy courtesy; he was received with a cold and measured stateliness; was seldom requested to stop, and seldomer, to repeat his visit; and one of his companions used to relate with what indignant feeling the poet recounted his fruitless calls and his uncordial receptions in the good town of Edinburgh. He went to Edinburgh, strong in the belief that genius such as his would raise him in society; he returned not without a sourness of spirit and a bitterness of feeling."



This bitterness against the inequalities of society was never sweetened in his soul. He resented with proud indignation,

the patronizing pity that came to him from the haughty nobility. His soul abhorred the aristocracy of blood and the shoddy rank of wealth. Henceforth he lived to vindicate the dignity of man, and the aristocracy of genius. The great period of his song writing now began.



Before leaving Edinburgh he secured a position as gauger in the excise service of his country, and he rented the farm of Ellisland situated on the west bank of the river Nith, and about six miles above the town of Dumfries. He returned from Edinburgh resolved henceforth to live for his wife and children. He was happy in the thought. The farm of Ellisland would be the future cheerful home of the poet's family. Here he could treat the caprices of the world with indifference, happy in the smile and song of Bonnie Jean, and amid the prattle of his noisy children. Here he could meet haughtiness with pride; disdain with contempt; insults with scorn, and sing among the trees on the hillside or by the river's brink, to his heart's content. And thus he writes:

*To make a happy fireside clime  
To weans and wife;  
That's the true pathos and sublime  
Of human life.*

Only partially did Burns realize his ideas, but he says himself that the three years he spent at Ellisland were the happiest of his life. It was indeed a lovely home for a peasant poet.



When he came to the farm there was no house on it, and he had to leave Jean and the children at Mauchline until a house was built for them. While making preparations for bringing them to the farm, he lived in a wretched, smoky hovel and isolated from all sympathetic companions. In this condi-

tion Burns became miserable and he writes: "I am such a coward in life, so tired of the service, that I would almost at any time with Milton's Adam gladly lay me in my mother's lap and be at peace. But a wife and children bind me to struggle with the stream till some sudden squall shall upset the silly vessel, or in the listless return of years, its own craziness reduce it to wreck."



He began building the house on his farm and as he laid the foundation stone he caused the workmen to cease; and there, under the open canopy of heaven, with uncovered head and reverent mien, he prayed for God's blessing on his future home. A day or two after this he wrote to his wife Jean, not to any sweetheart, that most tender and manly of all his love songs:

*Of a' the airts the wind can blaw,  
I dearly lo'e the west,  
For there the bonnie lassie lives,  
The lassie I lo'e best;  
There's wild-woods grow, and rivers row,  
And mony a hill between:  
But day and night my fancy's flight  
Is ever wi' my Jean.*

*I see her in the dewy flowers,  
I see her sweet and fair;  
I hear her in the tunefu' birds,  
I hear her charm the air;  
There's not a bonnie flower that springs,  
By fountain, shaw, or green;  
There's not a bonnie bird that sings,  
But minds me o' my Jean.*

That is a married man's love song. Perhaps it is as well to say here that after he took up house at Ellisland, he was as regular in keeping up family worship, attending church and catechising the children as his father had been before him. He was a kind husband and he desired to be an exemplary parent.

His new vocation as an exciseman for which he received the salary of £50 a year, was very distasteful to him. It made him, in a sense, unpopular. Never was publican in worse repute among the Jews than was the gauger among the Scottish folk and nothing could be more galling to Burns than the reproach or detestation of his fellow countrymen. But for the sake of his children he bore the shame and earned the money. Here is what he says about it:

*Searching auld wives' barrels,  
Ochon the day!  
That clarty barm should stain my laurels:  
But—what'll say?  
These movin' things ca'd wives an' weans,  
Wad move the very hearts o' stanes!*



But he was a kind-hearted gauger and many an old woman blessed him for his leniency in enforcing the excise law. A woman who had been brewing for the fair saw Burns coming. She slipped out at the back door. Burns entered; asked the servant girl: "Has there been any brewing for the fair here today?" "No" said the girl, "we have no license." "That is not true" cried the little child, "the big black chest is fu' o' big bottles that my mither sat up all night brewing for the fair." "We are in a hurry just now" said Burns, "but when we return from the fair we will examine the big chest."



Indeed there is nothing more characteristic of the poetry of Burns than the breathing of tenderheartedness. He is in sympathy with all sufferers, from the limping hare to the mourning swan.



His duties as a gauger led him to travel continually over the country. His mode of life at this time is thus described:

“From the castle to the cottage every door flew open at his approach; and the old system of hospitality then flourishing rendered it difficult for the most soberly inclined guest to rise from any man’s board in the same trim that he sat down to it. The farmer, if Burns was seen passing, left his reapers and trotted by the side of Jenny Geddes (his trusty mare) until he could persuade the bard that the day was hot enough to require an extra libation. If he entered an inn at midnight after all the inmates were in bed, the news of his arrival circulated from cellar to garret, and in ten minutes the landlord and all his guests were assembled round the ingle, the largest punch bowl was produced and:

*Be ours tonight—who cares what comes tomorrow*  
was the language of every eye in the circle that welcomed him. The highest gentry of the neighbourhood, when bent on special merriment, did not think the occasion complete unless the wit and eloquence of Burns were called in to enliven their carousals.” And if Burns drank deep, the fault is largely due to the age in which he lived and the men with whom he associated. From such scenes as these his love of merriment and whiskey grew stronger, and often saturated his poetry. None ever described the feelings of intoxication better than Burns in these famous lines from *Tam O’ Shanter*:

*Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,  
O’er a’ the ills o’ life victorious.*



One merry meeting at a house in Moffatdale with his two boon companions, Allan Masterton and William Nicol, he has immortalized in one of the best Bacchanalian songs ever written, and for which Masterton supplied the music:

*O Willie brew’d a peck o’ maut,  
And Bob and Allan cam to pree;  
Three blyther hearts, that lee-lang night,  
Ye wadna find in Christendie.*

We are na fou, we're na that fou,  
But just a drappie in our e'e;  
The cock may crawl, the day may daw'  
And aye we'll taste the barley bree.

Here are we met, three merry boys,  
Three merry boys I trow are we;  
And mony a night we've merry been,  
And mony mair we hope to be!

It is the moon, I ken her horn,  
That's blinkin' in the lift sae hie;  
She shines sae bright, to wyle us hame,  
But, by my sooth, she'll wait a wee!

Wha first shall rise to gang awa,  
A cuckold, coward loun is he!  
Wha first beside his chair shall fa',  
He is the King amang us three.



In less than ten years after, they were all dead. In 1821, John Struthers, a sweet Scottish poet, wrote the following:

Nae mair in learning Willie toils,  
Nor Allan wakes the melting lay;  
Nor Rab in fancy witching wiles  
Beguiles the hours o' dawning day.

For tho they were na very fou,  
That wicked wee drap in the e'e  
Has done its turn; untimely now  
The green grass waves o'er a' the three.



Burns was observed to be somewhat melancholy every year in the month of October which was known to be the anniversary of Highland Mary's death. In 1789, Jean, his

wife, says: "He grew sad about something and wandered solitary on the banks of the Nith and about his own farm yard nearly all night in the extremest agitation of mind. He screened himself on the lee side of one of his own corn stacks from the biting wind, and lingered till approaching dawn wiped out the stars one by one from the firmament. After being frequently entreated to come in, he did so, and sat down and penned these words:

*Thou ling'ring star, with less'ning ray,  
That lov'st to greet the early morn,  
Again thou usher'st in the day  
My Mary from my soul was torn.  
O Mary! dear departed shade!  
Where is thy place of blissful rest?  
See'st thou thy lover lowly laid?  
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?*

*That sacred hour can I forget,  
Can I forget the hallow'd grove,  
Where, by the winding Ayr we met,  
To live one day of parting love!  
Eternity can not efface  
Those records dear of transports past;  
Thy image at our last embrace,  
Ah! little thought we 'twas our last!*

*Ayr, gurgling kiss'd his pebbled shore,  
O'erhung with wild-woods, thickening green;  
The fragrant birch and hawthorne hoar,  
'Twin'd amorous round the raptur'd scene;  
The flowers sprang wanton to be prest,  
The birds sang love on every spray;  
Till too, too soon, the glowing west,  
Proclaim'd the speed of winged day.*

*Still o'er these scenes my mem'ry wakes,  
And fondly broods with miser care;  
Time but th' impression deeper makes;  
As streams their channels deeper wear.*



*My Mary! dear departed shade!  
Where is thy place of blissful rest?  
See'st thou thy lover lowly laid?  
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?*



At the same season, in 1792, he wrote:

*Ye banks, and braes, and streams around  
The castle o' Montgomery!  
Green be your woods, and fair your flowers,  
Your waters never drumlie:  
There Simmer first unfaulds her robes,  
And there the langest tarry;  
For there I took the last farewell  
O' my sweet Highland Mary.*

*Wi' mony a vow, and lock'd embrace,  
Our parting was fu' tender;  
And, pledging aft to meet again,  
We tore oursels asunder;  
But oh! fell death's untimely frost,  
That nipt my flower sae early!  
Now green's the sod, and cauld's the clay  
That wraps my Highland Mary!*

*O pale, pale now, those rosy lips,  
I aft hae kiss'd sae fondly!  
And closed for aye, the sparkling glance  
That dwelt on me sae kindly!  
And mould'ring now in silent dust,  
That heart that lo'ed me dearly!  
But still within my bosom's core  
Shall live my Highland Mary.*

There is probably nothing more pathetic in lyric poetry than those two songs.

The occasion of his writing "Bonnie Doon" is thus described by himself: "March, 1791. While here I sit, sad and solitary, by the side of a fire in a little country inn and drying my wet clothes, in pops a poor fellow of a soger, and tells me he is going to Ayr. By heavens: I say to myself, with a tide of good spirits which the magic of that sound, Auld Toon O' Ayr, conjured up, I will send my last song to Mr. Ballantine." Then follows the song:

*Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon,  
How can ye bloom sae fresh and fair?  
How can ye chant ye little birds,  
And I sae weary fu' o' care!  
Thou'll break my heart, thou warbling bird,  
That wantons thro' the flowering thorn;  
Thou minds me o' departed joys,  
Departed never to return.*

*Aft hae I rov' by Bonnie Doon,  
To see the rose and woodbine twine;  
And ilka bird sang o' its luve,  
And fondly sae did I o' mine;  
Wi' lightsome heart I pu'd a rose,  
Fu' sweet upon its thorny tree!  
And my fause luvver staw my rose,  
But ah! he left the thorn wi' me.*



Burns became nervous, despondent and melancholy notwithstanding the jovial scenes in which he mingled. His struggle with life became more and more a forlorn hope, but he bore up manfully, and often laughed when he felt like weeping. His sensitive spirit chafed terribly against the restraints of poverty and neglect; still he kept up the fight heroically, defying the world and fighting his conscience.

To this period of his history belongs the weird tale "Tam O' Shanter". He composed it, as he did many of his best productions, in a fit of poetic frenzy. He spent the day on the banks of the Nith. His wife, with her children, went to join him among the bushes in the afternoon. She came on him when he was humming the production over to himself. She watched while he gesticulated and writhed in body like a madman. Presently he came up to her in the greatest state of excitement and recited to her these lines:

*Now Tam, O Tam! had thae been queans,  
A' plump and strapping in their teens;  
Their sarks, instead o' creeshie flannen,  
Been snaw-white, seventeen hunder linen!*

*Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair,  
That ance were plush, o' gude blue hair,  
I wad hae gi'en them off my hurdies,  
For ae blink o' the bonnie burdies!*

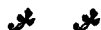
"I wish ye had seen him", said his wife, "He was in such ecstasy that the tears were hopping down his cheeks."



His farming was a failure at Ellisland; he lost all the money he made by the publication of his poems. He gave up the farm, sold everything out by public auction and determined to come and live in the town of Dumfries, and confine his attention to excise duties and song writing. It was painful to Burns to think of leaving his home and stooping to live by the degrading calling of a gauger; still more painful was it for him to be sneered and laughed at as a fool that had failed, or a sinner that had wasted his substance in riotous living. He expresses his feelings on this point in these strong words written in a letter to a friend:

"God help the children of Dependence! Hated and persecuted by their enemies, and too often, alas, almost unexceptionally received by their friends with respect and reproach under

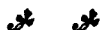
the thin guise of cold civility and humiliating advice. Oh to be a sturdy savage, stalking in the pride of his independence amid the solitary wilds of his desert, rather than in civilized life, helplessly to tremble for a subsistence precarious as the caprice of a fellow creature. Every man has his virtues, and no man is without his failings, and curse on that privilege of plain-speaking of friendship which, in the hour of my calamity, cannot reach forth a helping hand without at the same time pointing out those failings and apportioning them their share in procuring my present distress . . . I do not want to be independent that I may sin, but I want to be independent in my sinning."



In this spirit he left Ellisland and came to Dumfries—the grave of the poet—around which he wandered for nearly four years singing amid toil and sadness and merriment, till he laid him down in the lap of mother earth and was at rest.

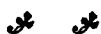


Burns came to Dumfries in the latter part of 1791, and continued his duties as a gauger by day and entered on a continual round of convivialities by night. He himself says this is my daily occupation: "Hurry of business, grinding the faces of the publican and the sinner on the merciless wheels of the excise; making ballads and then drinking and singing them; (and over and above all, correcting the press of two different publications)." And so, in what was to him weary drudgery and miserable merriment, Burns went hastily on to a premature grave; and it was in his weakest, darkest hours that he sang some of the strongest, noblest strains that he ever uttered.



It was the time of the French Revolution. Burns, like many others, was on the side of the people. One day the *Rosamund*, a smuggling ship, was captured off the Scottish

coast and sold by the Sheriff. Burns bought four of her guns and sent them as a present to the French Legislative Assembly with a letter sympathizing with the Revolutionists. Those guns and that letter were intercepted by the British authorities. Henceforth he became a suspected character, lost all hope of preferment in the excise service, and was nearly dismissed from his position altogether. Through the intercession of influential friends, however, he was let off with a reprimand and warning, but he could not be gagged. At a public banquet a short time after this when the health of Pitt, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, was drunk, Burns rose and proposed the health of a "much better man, General Washington". This and some other such toasts which he gave among boon companions nearly cost him his head. But amid all these troubles he continued to sing with uncommon power and sweetness. At this period he was contributing regularly to Johnson's Museum of Scottish Songs and to Thomson's Collection of Scottish Melodies, to both of which he gave the best songs they contained, but, poor as he was, he would accept no money for his productions.



The tradition is that he composed "Scots Wha Hae Wi' Wallace Bled" when riding over a Galloway moor in company with a Mr. Symes in the midst of a fierce tempest. It should, says Carlyle, be sung through the throat of the whirlwind.



About this period he writes to his friend Alexander Cunningham in these words: "Canst thou minister to a mind diseased? Canst thou speak peace and rest to a soul tossed on a sea of troubles without one friendly star to guide her course, and dreading that the next surge may overwhelm her. Of late a number of domestic vexations, and some pecuniary share in the ruin of these cursed times—losses which though trifling,

were what I could ill bear—have so irritated me, that my feelings at times could only be envied by a reprobate spirit listening to the sentence that dooms it to perdition.”



Shortly after giving up the Ellisland farm and coming to Dumfries, Burns wrote to Dr. Cunningham in 1791: “Are you deep in the language of consolation? I have exhausted in reflection every topic of comfort. A heart at ease would have been charmed with my sentiments and reasonings; but as to myself I was like Judas Iscariot preaching the Gospel...Still, there are two great pillars that bear us up amid the wreck of misfortune and misery. The one is composed of a certain noble stubborn something in man known by the names of Courage, Fortitude, Magnanimity. The other is made of those feelings and sentiments which connect us with, and link us to, those awful obscure realities, an all-powerful and equally beneficent God and a world to come beyond death and the grave. The first gives the nerve of combat while a ray of hope beams on the field. The last forms the balm of comfort into wounds which time can never cure.”



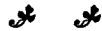
It was in this mood, and as he sat at his ain fireside looking at his children and listening to the singing of his bonnie Jean that he composed: “A Man’s A Man For A’ That”, a song that makes every chord of the heart of manhood quiver.



During the spring of 1795 he joined the Volunteer Corps that was raised in Dumfries in view of a threatened French invasion. It is said he handled his musket very awkwardly. But he composed a song which for strong Scottish loyal feeling has never been excelled. It took hold of the Scottish heart from one end of the country to the other and pacified the disaffected in every shire.

*Does haughty Gaul invasion threat?  
 Then let the loons beware, Sir;  
 There's wooden walls upon our seas,  
 And volunteers on shore, Sir:  
 The Nith shall run to Corsincon,  
 And Criffel sink in Solway,  
 Ere we permit a Foreign Foe  
 On British ground to rally!*

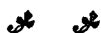
*The wretch that would a tyrant own,  
 And the wretch, his true-born brother,  
 Who would set Mob aboon the Throne,  
 May they be damn'd together!  
 Who will not sing "God save the King",  
 Shall hang as high's the steeple;  
 But while we sing "God save the King",  
 We'll ne'er forget The People!*



In the month of October, 1795 he was taken ill and confined to his bed till about the beginning of January of the following year. Little is known of this sickness except what he himself says of it in a rhymed letter to a friend:

*Ye've heard this while how I've been lickit,  
 And by fell Death was nearly nickit;  
 Grim loon! he got me by the feeket,  
     And sair me sheuk;  
 But by gude luck I lap a wicket,  
     And turn'd a neuk.  
 But by that health, I've got a share o't,  
  
 But by that life, I'm promis'd mair o't,  
 My hale and weel, I'll tak a care o't,  
     A tentier way;  
 Then farewell folly, hide and hair o't,  
     For ance and aye!*

When recovering from this sickness he met a neighbour on the street and said to her: "I find a man may live like a fool but he will scarcely die like one."



But his old habits overcame him and he was again stricken down by rheumatic fever contracted by exposure after an excessive indulgence at a jovial party in the Globe tavern.



In April, 1796, he was again confined to his bed with the illness from which he never altogether recovered. His devoted Jean was unable to attend him in his sickness; but Jessie Lewars, the daughter of a neighbouring exciseman, came to the house and nursed the dying poet. She was peculiarly patient and kind in her attention to the sufferer. Burns, who knew that his end was approaching, was very grateful for Jessie's kindness. He asked her what he could do for her to show his gratitude, "for you know", he said, "I have no money to give you". "O", she said, "you can write me a song some day." "Well", replied Burns, "Tell me the air for which you want words and I'll try." She sat down at the piano and played over the air:

*The robin cam to the wren's nest,  
And keekit in, and keekit in.*

Burns took the melody, hummed it over to himself for a considerable time and finally produced these words addressed to Jessie:

*O wert thou in the cauld blast,  
On yonder lea, on yonder lea,  
My plaidie to the angry airt,  
I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee;  
Or did misfortune's bitter storms  
Around thee blaw, around thee blaw,  
Thy bield should be my bosom,  
To share it a', to share it a'.*



*Or were I in the wildest waste,  
Sae black and bare, sae black and bare,  
The desert were a Paradise,  
If thou wert there, if thou wert there;  
Or were I Monarch o' the globe,  
Wi' thee to reign, wi' thee to reign,  
The brightest jewel in my Crown  
Wad be my Queen, wad be my Queen.*

Mendelssohn, the great German composer, was so struck by this song that he composed for it a specially beautiful air. But I suppose nothing will ever fit it as well as its own native melody.



In the beginning of July he rallied a little and on the 4th he left Dumfries for a short visit to Brow, a solitary place on the Solway Firth, where he tried sea bathing. An intimate lady friend who was here also for health, but who long survived him, gives an interesting account of their meeting at this place from which we make a few extracts.

"I was struck with his appearance on entering the room. The stamp of death was imprinted on his features. He seemed already touching the brink of eternity. His first salutation was, 'Well, madam, have you any commands for the other world?' I replied that it seemed a doubtful case which of us should be there soonest, and I hoped he would yet live to write my epitaph . . . His anxiety for his family seemed to hang heavy on him, and the more, perhaps, from the reflection that he had not done them all the justice he was so well qualified to do. Passing from this subject he showed great concern about the care of his literary fame and particularly the posthumous publication of his works. He said he was well aware that his death would create some noise and that every scrap of his writings would be revived against him to the injury of his future reputation; that his

letters and verses, written with unguarded freedom, and which he earnestly wished to have buried in oblivion, would be bandied about by idle vanity when no dread of his resentment would restrain them . . . There was frequently a considerable degree of vivacity in his sallies, and they would probably have had a greater share, had not the concern and dejection he could not disguise dampened the spirit of pleasantry he seemed not unwilling to indulge."



While at Brow he wrote to Mr. Thomson, the compiler of the collection of Scottish songs to which he was contributing, this:

"After all my boasted independence, curst necessity compels me to implore you for five pounds. Do for God's sake send me that sum and that by return of post. Forgive me this earnestness, but the horrors of a jail have made me half distracted. I do not ask all this gratuitously, for upon returning health I hereby promise and engage to furnish you with five pounds worth of the neatest song genius you have seen. I tried my hand on Rothermurchie this morning. The measure is so difficult it is impossible to infuse much genius in the lines. They are on the other side. Forgive, forgive me. Robert Burns."



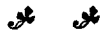
On the other side was found the last song which Burns ever wrote. It was a sweet recollection of one whom he met on his tour through Scotland at Howieston on the Banks of the River Devon. Sweet memories of country life shed their fragrance over his soul in that sad hour. He lived in the country and seemed always to have before him its banks, braes and streams. The chief enjoyment of his life centered in love. To this keynote he tuned his poetic lyre at first and on it he sang his dying strains. His first and last poetic effusions were love

songs. Here is his last attempt to kindle the old fire when death was playing with his heart strings:

*Fairest maid on Devon banks,  
Crystal Devon, winding Devon,  
Wilt thou lay that frown aside,  
And smile as thou wert wont to do?*

*Full well thou know'st I love thee dear,  
Couldst thou to malice lend an ear!  
O did not Love exclaim: "Forbear,  
Nor use a faithful lover so."*

*Then come, thou fairest of the fair,  
Those wonted smiles, O let me share;  
And by thy beauteous self I swear,  
No love but thine my heart shall know.*



He returned to Dumfries from Brow on the 18th day of July. The hand of death was on him. His friends who saw him descend from the spring cart on which he had come from Brow knew he was a dying man. The news that Burns had come home to die spread quickly through the town. His illness and approaching end became the general subject of conversation on the streets, in the stores, at the fireside and in all places of public concourse of the people. Many sweet memories of the sayings and doings of the poet were recalled. All spoke of him with sadness and not a few wept as they asked, "How is Burns?" At one street corner Dr. Maxwell, who was his attending physician, heard a voice in an eager crowd asking, "Who do you think will be our poet now, when Robin is gone?"



For three days the poet lay slowly sinking as life ebbed gradually away. He was often roused to consciousness by the visits of his friends. He spoke tenderly of his wife who lay

helpless in an adjoining room. He looked wistfully and tenderly on his four children who were thoughtlessly playing about the house. He thanked Jessie Lewars for her loving self-denying attentions to his dying wants and her kindness to his sick wife. He roused himself once to say to a brother volunteer, "John, do not let the awkward squad fire over my grave." A few hours afterwards on the 21st of July, 1796, in the 37th year of his age, the end came, and the sad, sorrowful, but brilliant life of Burns closed. On that day the sound of his tongue was silenced forever, but the music of his songs waxes louder and louder as the years roll past. The news spread like a wail of anguish over all Scotland. In the hour of their bitter grief his countrymen forgot his faults and remembered only his virtues. They gave him a public funeral and buried him with military honours. They paid homage to the poet and mourned for the man. The gentry remembered their ingratitude when it was too late, and tried to atone for their mistake by praising his merits and genius. No man ever took a deeper hold on the hearts of any people than Burns on the hearts of Scotsmen, and wherever Scottish music is appreciated the name of Burns is honoured. He, being dead, yet sings with his broad Scottish accent for the world.



His voice has found an echo in the hearts of men throughout the whole earth. His words are quoted wherever the English language is known. His name occupies a lofty place among the geniuses of the world. His grave has become the place of pilgrimage for strangers from all lands who come to Dumfries to pay honour to the memory and genius of the peasant poet.



I may perhaps be allowed, without being considered egotistical, to draw a little on personal recollections. It has been

my privilege to visit the scenes made sacred and classic by the life and poetry of Burns. Nowhere was I more affected by the thoughts that came over me than in the old church where he was accustomed to worship, and where the marks he made on the woodwork of the pew in which he sat are still visible, and especially as I passed out into the old churchyard where he was laid to rest among the dust of many Scottish worthies. There, as I stood among the gravestones, I was reminded that Burns once wrote:

“I am transported at the thought that, ere long, very soon, I shall bid an eternal adieu to all the pains and uneasiness and inquietudes of this weary life; for I assure you I am heartily tired of it; and if I do not very much deceive myself, I could contentedly and gladly resign it.

*The son uneasy and confined at home  
Rests and expatiates on a life to come.*

It is for this reason I am more pleased with the 15th, 16th and 17th verses of the 7th chapter of Revelations than with any ten times as many verses in the whole Bible, and would not exchange the noble enthusiasm with which they inspire me for all that this world has to offer.”



These verses are: “Therefore are they before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple, and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them into living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

The tear was often seen in Burns' eye as he repeated or read those verses.



The mausoleum that until lately marked his resting place is an unsightly structure. His remains were placed beneath it on the 19th of September, 1815. As we stood within the sacred precincts of that hallowed place with a dear friend on our last visit, some years ago, we deciphered the tawdry Latin by which it is disfigured and turned with relief to read this Epitaph written by the poet himself ten years before his death, and felt that it was true to nature and to history:

*Is there a whim-inspired fool,  
Owe fast for thought, owe hot for rule,  
Owe blate to seek, ower proud to snool,  
Let him draw near;  
And owe this grassy heap sing dool,  
And drap a tear.*

*Is there a bard of rustic song,  
Who, noteless, steals the crowds among,  
That weekly this area throng,  
O, pass not by!  
But, with a frater-feeling strong,  
Here heave a sigh.*

*Is there a man, whose judgment clear  
Can others teach the course to steer,  
Yet runs, himself, life's mad career,  
Wild as the wave,  
Here pause—and thro' the starting tear,  
Survey this grave.*

*The poor inhabitant below  
Was quick to learn and wise to know,  
And keenly felt the friendly glow,  
And softer flame;  
But thoughtless follies laid him low,  
And stain'd his name!*

*Reader, attend! whether thy soul  
Soars fancy's flights beyond the pole,  
Or darkling grubs this earthly hole,  
In low pursuit:  
Know, prudent, cautious, self-control  
Is wisdom's root.*



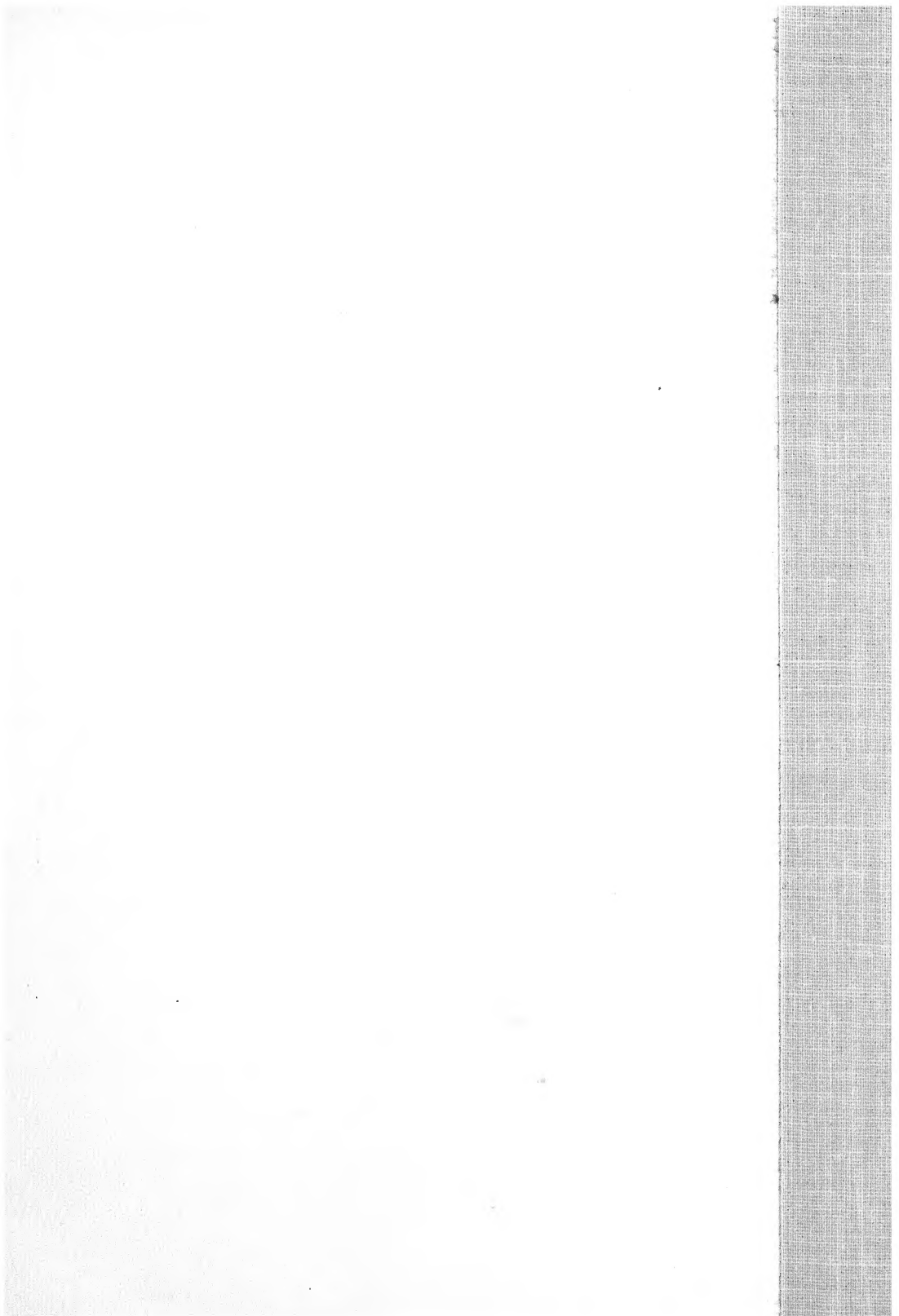
THE END













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